

The Closed Gentian

By Virginia Latta Weaver

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The serious business

of settling up her brother's estate was about finished. Miss Morton leaned wearily back in her invalid's chair and sighed. After all, she was sorry. Doubtless it would mean a cessation of her lawyer's frequent and periodic visits. And—well, he had been something new under her sun.

"I leave for Bar Harbor tomorrow, to be gone a week. On my return I'll send you a telegram and arrange for our final interview." Howell Orchard's crisp, staccato sentences punctured her reverie. He was picking up his gloves. A high cart had just driven under the porte-cochere, and Miss Morton's liveried groom was busy quieting the antics of a pair of brown cobs.

Miss Morton groped for a pretext to spin out the call of her lawyer—if only for five minutes. It was stupid of Peter to have driven up so early—and so bourgeois! Her eye fell on the nearest object—a bowl of orchids.

"Exquisite, are they not?" she said, with a slight indicating motion of her patrician, blue veined hand. Orchard's keen glance noted them, at the same time ranging the extravagant refinement of the room.

"In keeping with their surroundings, Miss Morton," he rejoined, pulling on his left hand glove. "Artistically correct."

She made no further pretext. It was fatuous, but it answered her purpose. "What is your favorite flower?" she asked.

It was an insane question, and she bit her lip. But, to her relieved surprise, Orchard gave her inquiry his consideration.

"The closed gentian," he said after a slight pause.

Wynchell, Miss Morton's country home, with its ancestral acres, was about far enough from Jersey City to leave time on the suburban train for a comfortable perusal of the paper and a yawn or two besides.

Orchard spread out his sheet mechanically. But even the stock market news didn't seem to interest him, and he looked far beyond his paper. That was only natural. He was looking back through several seasons of blossoms and snow, this man, who, young as he was, had already begun to be called a woman hater. The whizzing telegraph wires and poles passed unseen. The noise of the engine, the rumble of the wheels, dwindled into silence. In their stead came the low, exquisite voice of a girl:

"It's such a beautiful little flower inside, Howell!"

The day had been full of late September elixir, then as now. The tread of loveliness had been on the fields of grass and fodder ripened by August suns and tanned by early frosts to an autumnal bronze. Somewhere from among the hedges of sumac had come the call of a quail. Then presently the girl had stopped near a silvery stream and plucked a plain enough looking dark blue flower and pinned it on his coat.

"It's a closed gentian, you know, dear," she had explained, while the soft tendrils of her hair had unconsciously brushed his strong chin. "You see," she went on, stooping to pluck another, "they're not so very handsome outside, but inside—look!" Delicately as a spring zephyr she had pricked the portals open. "It puts the flaming goldenrod and all the staring purple daisies here to shame, doesn't it?" She lifted her face to him—the face of a girl not particularly beautiful, but glorified by a dazzling smile.

He had left her at the gate of her little western home and, leaning over the rustic fence in the privacy of the broad oak, had bid her goodbye, for he was going to the big eastern metropolis for a year or two to win fame and fortune for them both. He went away with the sweetness of her kiss upon his lips, her tear upon his cheek, her flower in his coat.

Later there had come a misunderstanding, of the slight, insignificant sort that most young lovers have; but, alas, in this case before the gentle, healing wind of the real truth had blown tragedy had visited the girl's home, and when the man sought her she was not to be found. Out in her little western village people told a tale of her father's long illness and death—how she had nursed him night and day with untiring tenderness; how, their slight income being exhausted, she had taken up dinner color work and filled orders for dinner cards and little pictures; how finally, upon his death, she had gone to New York city to earn her living in such fashion as she could.

That was all Orchard had been able to learn, and that had been two years ago. To find a girl who does water color work on dinner cards in New York city is not an easy matter. By the time his train had reached the smoke of the tunnel the man with the unread paper was thoroughly out of conceit with one Emily; by the time the ferryboat had bumped into the slip on the New York side he was thoroughly out of conceit with himself.

Miss Morton brought her lorgnon to bear upon the flowers Miss Gray had just brought in.

"So they are what you call close

gentians?" questioned she half incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"I'm very sure, Miss Morton." The girl's voice was exquisitely low and musical.

"But they're so homely, so undeluded looking, and I thought—well, never mind. Arrange them there in that vase, if you will. My lawyer, a young fellow in whom I've taken a great interest, is coming up to Wynchell today, and they are his favorite flower."

Miss Gray lost the last of the sentence. From the silver faucet in Miss Morton's marble bathtub, she was drawing water for the cut glass she held. Besides, Miss Morton had spoken more than half to herself.

It had been only three days now that Miss Gray had been with her in the capacity of companion, and already Miss Morton found herself exchanging that young person's status from companion to confidante. She had always had a liking for her, this girl with the tired, pale face and the sweet, sudden smile, ever since the day when she had come personally to explain that there had been some little mistake in the ordered dinner cards and to make her apologies. It appears she had given the dinner ladies powdered silver hair instead of dazzling gold. That had been at the beginning of last season. During the present summer the little sketches that she had been able to sell hadn't proved sufficient for her to eke out even a modest existence with. Miss Morton was looking for a companion, and she had offered her services. That is the way it had all come about.

There was the rhythmic thud-thud of horses' hoofs on macadam, and Miss Morton's brown cobs whirled through an iron gate into a modest drive and came to an abrupt halt under her porte-cochere. A gray drizzle had set in, but what did that matter to Howell Orchard? The fine drops of rain driven against his face by the pace of the cobs had been an exhilarating delight to him, and as Miss Morton was wheeled into the library to greet him he was positively cordial.

Miss Morton had forgotten her lorgnon. Being very shortsighted, she was at a loss to know exactly where her companion had placed the gentians. And, above all things, should the sight of the flowers bring an appreciable fraction of pleasure into Orchard's immobile face she didn't want to lose the sight. She rang for a maid.

"Ask Miss Gray to fetch me my lorgnon," said she.

"So you remembered!" The exclamation came from Orchard, and Miss Morton lost the sight she had wished for, after all. He had crossed to an ebony cabinet on top of which stood the cut glass vase. "Awkward things to arrange in vases, though," he commented laconically, as if regretting his burst of emotion.

"Yes, that's what my companion said. She went out willingly enough in all this drizzle to pluck them, but she shied at arranging them in a vase. She assures me they belong to the fields, and—"

But Orchard veered quickly around. In the mirror back of the ebony cabinet he'd caught the reflection of a girl's face. Before he had seen her face, though, he had recognized her. There was no other woman he knew who held her head so proudly and at the same time had that wavering little walk so at variance with the queenly carriage of her head.

"Emily!" he cried. "You!" The girl's hand which held the lorgnon clutched it tightly and went up to her breast. The other half groped toward him, as with a little incredulous cry she repeated the one word, "You!"

"Too bad, too bad," murmured kind hearted Miss Morton indulgently to herself that evening, laying down her Goethe unread. The day had cleared beautifully. The last scrap of estate settling business had been attended to, and now her lawyer and her companion were enjoying a bit of the melon harvest moon out on the back veranda. "Too bad! I was just beginning to congratulate myself on what a treasure Miss Gray would be in my declining years, and now—the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end, Marie," she said, turning to the maid, "take those homely blue flowers away. Take them up to Miss Gray's room."

Fish's Lucky Omen.

Fish is a sign of good omen. In Bengal, when the bride comes to the bridegroom for the first time in the house of the latter, the former has to catch hold of a fish in a certain welcome ceremony. In prospect, perhaps, of a generation as fruitful as that of a fish. While entering a new house for the first time the lady is to take hold of a fish, probably for the same reason. Whatever may be the reason for regarding the handling of fish as auspicious, it is indisputable that over a large part of northern India the "water vegetable" (as it is called by high caste Punjabis, who eat it in spite of its being considered forbidden food for Brahmins, Khattris and Banias) is taken to assure good luck. The writer of this was hastening to Nepal to see a sister who was dangerously ill. He came across a Nepalese gentleman near Patna, who offered to accompany him to his destination, being moved to pity on hearing of his errand. When crossing the Ganges from Digha Ghat to Paleza Ghat a big blue fish fell at his feet on the deck of the steamer as if hurled by an unseen hand. Perhaps it had been struck by the stern wheel and thrown up over the bulwark. The Nepalese friend jumped up in great excitement, exclaiming: "Here is a sign from heaven—the happiest omen for you, my lad. You will find your sister out of danger." All classes in Nepal share the superstition of the Bengalis in regard to fish.—Lahore Tribune

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STOPPED THE OVATION.

Richard Wagner's Peculiar Experience in Vienna.

When Wagner was at the height of his popularity he visited Vienna. Baron von Beust, then chancellor of the empire, was informed that the Prussian party intended to give him an immense serenade—a serenade which would have the air of German protest against the tendency of the ministry to make the union of Hungary and Austria more intimate. The demonstration promised to arouse strong feeling.

"Your excellency is warned," said the chancellor's advisers. "It is impossible to stop this manifestation unless Wagner goes away, and he loves ovations too well. Nothing will induce him to depart."

"You think so," said Beust, with a smile.

An hour later Wagner was invited to dine with the chancellor. He was flattered by the invitation and accepted it. After dinner, at which Beust was delightfully affable and entertaining, the chancellor remarked: "Herr Wagner, are you interested in autographs? I have some very curious ones to show you." And he opened a portfolio where were letters of Palmerston, Bismarck, Napoleon III., Helme and others.

Suddenly turning to a paper, dated 1848, he said: "Ah, look at this. It is very curious. What would your friend his highness the king of Bavaria say if this paper, which would be significant in connection with the political serenade which the Germans are going to give you, should be published tomorrow in the Vienna papers?"

The composer examined the paper and recognized, with surprise, an old proclamation of one Richard Wagner, who, an ardent revolutionist in 1848, had proposed to the youth of that time to set fire to the palace of the king of Saxony. He saw his autograph and that it might be the means of getting him into serious trouble.

"Very curious, is it not, Herr Wagner?" said the minister.

"Very curious, your excellency," replied his guest.

The next morning Richard Wagner left Vienna, recalled to Baireuth by urgent business.—Strand Magazine.

MAKING WAMPUM.

A Process That Requires Both Patience and Skill.

With certain tribes wampum is still highly prized and necklaces are worn by men, women and children when they are the fortunate possessors of them. To make wampum various kinds of shells are used, white and those having a lavender blue being most liked.

The thin shells are broken into little pieces and by aid of filppers are made as nearly round as possible. When each piece is drilled in the center, the old time fire kindling style of drill being used, the shells are then strung and rolled with the hand on a flat stone, which grinds them until they are smooth and even.

Comparatively few Indians among those who prize wampum beads most highly have the skill or patience to make them, even though they had the materials. The fact is there are but few wampum bead makers in the country, and it often happens that long pilgrimages must be made to secure the requisites for really fine beads, and, as with the white man's trinkets, that which is "far fetched and dear bought" is most sought after for ornamentation.

Around some of the ancient ruins in the southwest the little disks of wampum are often found in the sand, and it is probable that they were deposited in the graves in very early times and washed out or exposed by the wind's action. These ruins are in the best state of preservation of any in the country. Absolutely nothing is known of their builders, and the origin of these ruins has as much a mystery when Coronado first saw them in 1540, when he made his famous invasion, as it is to the people of the present day.—Indian's Friend.

Oxygen and Mushrooms.

A singular way of removing oxygen from the air by the aid of a plant is as follows: Inside a glass bell jar, suspended over water, is placed a mushroom, and sunlight is allowed to fall upon the plant. The mushroom absorbs the oxygen from the air in the jar, and the carbonic acid formed during the process is absorbed by the water, which gradually rises in the jar to one-fifth of its height. The mushroom now dries up, but its animation is only suspended, as may be proved by introducing beside it a green plant, when it will recommence to vegetate, being nourished by the oxygen exhaled from the fresh plant.

Hope.
"Mr. Merchant," said the new clerk, preparing to ask for more money, "I think I understand the business pretty well now, and—"

"Yes?" interrupted his employer. "Well, keep at it four or five years. Perhaps you'll understand it then as well as you think you do now."—Philadelphia Press.

Taking Papa Down.
First Daughter—Oh, papa, dear, two young men we've met down here have asked us to marry them. Father—They'd better see me first. Second Daughter—Oh, they've seen you, papa, and they love us notwithstanding.

A Fashion Note.
Doctor (to female patient)—You've got a slight touch of fever. Your tongue has a thick coat—Patient (excitedly)—Oh, doctor, do tell me how it fits!

Reading is thinking with some one else's head instead of one's own.—Schopenhauer.

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